

	The period of history called the Renaissance takes place.
	Florence, Genoa, Pisa, Milan, and Venice flourish as trading centers.
	Dante Alighieri completes The Divine Comedy .
	Francesco Petrarch writes poetry.
	Giovanni Boccaccio writes The Decameron .
	Medicis begin a three-century domination of Florence and Tuscany.
	Sandro Botticelli paints The Birth of Venus .
	Leonardo da Vinci finishes the Last Supper .
	Raphael paints The School of Athens .
	Baldassare Castiglione publishes The Courtier .
	Michelangelo Buonarroti paints The Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel.
	Benvenuto Cellini begins his Autobiography .

14 THE EMERGENCE OF THE RENAISSANCE IN ITALY

Medieval political, economic, and social systems had never taken strong hold in Italy. Feudalism, a political power structure based on control of land, was imported into Italy from the north, but it never sank deep roots there. While northern Europe became mainly rural, Italian commerce continued to support an urban society. Moreover, manorial life in Italy never became as self-sufficient as it did in France, England, and Germany. Nor did the social classes created by feudalism and manorialism become firmly established in Italy.

Like ancient Greece, medieval Italy developed around city-states such as Genoa, Milan, Pisa, Florence, Venice, and Naples. Their political power grew from a firm economic base dominated by merchants and bankers. They outfitted the Crusaders and transported them on Italian ships. These ships came back filled with the products of the East, much in demand all over Europe.

The Renaissance emerged in these Italian cities. As new forces developed and combined, they changed the nature of society in the Italian cities. Then these forces reached into the surrounding areas and, in time, spread northward into all of western Europe.

What were these forces? Reading 14 contains excerpts from the writings of three Renaissance Italians. Using these documents, you should be able to develop and test hypotheses to explain why Italy developed a new type of society. Eventually this new society influenced most of the western world.

The frame of reference of the authors of this book influenced their choice of documents. Your frame of reference will color your interpretation of these documents. At the same time, your knowledge of inquiry skills should help you to ask good analytical questions and to be aware of bias. As you read, think about the following questions:

1. What characteristics of Italian cities did Piccolomini and Villani describe? Why do you think they chose these characteristics?
2. Which of Cosimo de Medici's characteristics did this biographer describe? Why do you think he chose those characteristics?

Genoa in 1432

The following selection is an excerpt translated from the letter Piccolomini wrote in 1432 while visiting Genoa.

Would you were with me! You would see a city which has no equal anywhere on earth. It lies upon a hill over which rude mountains tower, while the lower city is washed by the waves of the sea. The harbor is bow-shaped so that storms cannot do the ships any harm. And what a coming and going there is! You may see daily people of the most different sort with unimaginable rough manners and customs and traders with every conceivable ware. Right at the shore arise the most magnificent palaces, heaven-scaling, built of marble, decorated with columns and often too with sculptures. Under them runs an arcade for the length of a thousand steps where every conceivable object is for sale. The rest of the city winds upward along the side of the hill. In this section the houses are so large and distinguished that a king or a prince might be content with any one of them. The churches, beautiful as they are, do not seem to me to be worthy of such a city. However, they are not without splendor and boast some handsome tombs.

Now as to the life and customs of the population. The men are substantial, well grown, and impressive, carry themselves proudly and are in fact proud. They are a gifted folk, not likely to be found inferior to any other people in the quality of their mind. Strenuous labors they bear easily. Their deeds of bravery at sea are incredible. The advantages that come with profits and riches offer compensation for hardships.

They dress nobly and elegantly. They are not afflicted with thirst for education, though they learn languages as they need them. For other elements of the liberal arts they have little use, except as a possible relief

Der Briefwechsel des E. S. Piccolomini, herausgegeben von R. Wolkan. Fontes Rerum Austriacarum. I. Abtheilung, LXI. 7.
Translated by Edwin Fenton

►What hardships, if any, do you think are worth profits and riches?"

AN ARTIST OF THE RENAISSANCE

Benvenuto Cellini—goldsmith, sculptor, lover, braggart, and writer—left a vivid account of Renaissance culture and the life of Renaissance artists. He spent time with popes, dukes, and other leaders of European society. But more important, he filled his lively *Autobiography* with observations and criticisms of Renaissance art.



The School of Athens, 1509-12
Rome, Vatican, Stanza della Segnatura

Cellini lived from 1500 to 1571. During this time, the cultural achievements of the Italian Renaissance reached their peak. This was the period of writers and artists such as Boccaccio, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael. In their work, Renaissance individualism reached its artistic peak, ending a hundred years of experimentation with new techniques, materials, and subjects.

But the political conditions under which the Renaissance had flourished were changing. Many Renaissance leaders took measures to assure that their sons would inherit their power. This development severely limited the social mobility that was so much a part of the Renaissance. It prevented men of lower class origin from climbing the political, economic, and social ladders. Furthermore, French and Spanish invasions had ended the independence of Naples, Milan, and other Italian city-states.

Reading 15 contains passages from Cellini's *Autobiography*. In these excerpts, Cellini describes his work and the work of other artists for two of his patrons. As you read, try to answer the following questions:

1. Who were Cellini's patrons? What interested them?
2. What standards did Cellini use to criticize Bandinello's statue?

The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini

*The Autobiography of
Benvenuto Cellini*, George
Bull, trans. (Baltimore:
Penguin Books Ltd., 1956),
pp. 87-90, 335-338.
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Bull. Reprinted by
permission.
Traiano was the pope's head
attendant.

Michele and Pompeo were
jewelers and rivals of
Cellini.

Michele had obtained
designs for the pope's
button from a number of
draftsmen.

"I [Pope Clement VII] shall employ you on a very important work . . . the button for my cope [cloak] The design is to be a figure of God the Father, in half relief, and in the middle I want you to set that big, beautifully cut diamond, as well as a large number of other priceless gems"

Within a few days I had put the last touches to the model, and one morning I took it along to show the Pope. Traiano made me wait while he hurriedly sent for Michele and Pompeo, telling them to bring their designs with them. When they arrived, we were shown inside, and they immediately began to hold out their designs for the Pope to see. As it turned out, the draughtsmen [draftsmen] not being jewellers, had no idea how to set the gems, and the jewellers had not given them any instructions (and a jeweller must when he is introducing figures among his gems know how to draw; otherwise his work will be worthless). And so in all their designs, that marvellous diamond had been placed in the middle of God the Father's breast.

The Pope, whose judgement was very sound, saw what had happened and thought they were without merit. After he had inspected about ten of them, he threw the rest on the floor, turned to me, who was standing on one side, and said:

"Let me have a glance at your model, Benvenuto, so that I can see if you've made the same mistake as they have."

I came forward and opened a little round box; the Pope's eyes seemed to light up, and he cried out:

"You wouldn't have done it in any other way, even if you were my very self. The others couldn't have thought up a better way of disgracing themselves."

Then a great number of important noblemen flocked round, and the Pope pointed out to them the difference between my model and the other designs. He praised it to the skies, with those two [Michele and Pompeo] standing terrified and dumfounded in front of him, and then he turned to me and said:

"I can only see one snag, Benvenuto, but it's very important. It's easy to work in wax; the real test comes when one has to work in gold."

I answered him eagerly: "Holy Father, if it isn't ten times better than my model, we'll agree that I won't be paid for it"

What I had done was to place the diamond exactly in the centre of the whole work, with the figure of God the Father, gracefully turning to one side, seated above it, and so the design was beautifully balanced, and the figure did not detract from the jewel. With His right hand raised, God the Father was giving a blessing; and beneath the jewel I had placed three cherubs, supporting the diamond with raised arms; the middle one was in full, and the other two in half relief. Round about I had designed a crowd of cherubs, beautifully arranged with the other gems. God the Father was draped in a flowing mantle, from which the other cherubs peeped out; and there were many other exquisite adornments

One feast day or other I went along to the [Duke's] palace The Duke [greeted] me pleasantly:

"You're welcome! Look at that little chest that the lord Stefano of Palestrina has sent me as a present: open it and let's see what it is."

I opened it at once and said to the Duke: "My lord, it's a statue in Greek marble, and it's a splendid piece of work: I don't remember ever having seen such a beautiful antique statue of a little boy, so beautifully fashioned. Let me make an offer to your Most Illustrious Excellency to restore it—the head and the arms and the feet. I'll add an eagle so that we can christen it Ganymede. And although it's not for me to patch up statues—the sort of work done by botchers, who still make a bad job of it—the craftsmanship of this great artist calls me to serve him"

While I was entertaining the Duke in this agreeable way Bandinello came in [He said:]

► Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), an Italian humanist, wrote that God, in creating man, said to him: "I have set you in the center of the world." How would you agree or disagree with that opinion?

Cardini now describes his work for Cosimo I de' Medici, duke of Florence and nephew of Cosimo de' Medici, whom you read about earlier.

In Greek mythology Ganymede was rapturer for the gods.

Baccio Bandinello was a Florentine sculptor and painter who lived from about 1493 to 1560.

"My lord, here you have one of those things I have so often mentioned to you. You see, those ancients knew nothing about anatomy, and as a result their works are full of errors."

I remained silent, taking no notice of anything he was saying; in fact I had turned my back on him. As soon as the beast had finished his disagreeable babbling, the Duke said:

"But Benvenuto, this completely contradicts what you have just been proving with so many beautiful arguments. Let's hear you defend the statue a little."

In reply to this noble little speech of the Duke's, so pleasantly made, I said:

"My lord, your Most Illustrious Excellency must understand that Baccio Bandinello is thoroughly evil, and always has been. So no matter what he looks at, as soon as his disagreeable eyes catch sight of it, even though it's of superlative quality it is at once turned to absolute evil. But for myself, being only drawn to what is good, I see things in a more wholesome way. So what I told your Illustrious Excellency about this extremely beautiful statue is the unblemished truth; and what Bandinello said about it reflects only the badness of his own nature." . . .

Then Bandinello began to gabble. "My lord," he said, "when I uncovered my Hercules and Cacus I am sure that more than a hundred wretched sonnets were written about me, containing the worst abuse one could possibly imagine this rabble capable of."

Replying to this, I said: "My lord, when our Michelangelo Buonarroti revealed his Sacristy, where there are so many fine statues to be seen, our splendid talented Florentine artists, the friends of truth and excellence, wrote more than a hundred sonnets, every man competing to give the highest praise. As Bandinello's work deserved all the abuse that he says was thrown at it, so Buonarroti's deserved all the good that was said of it."

Bandinello grew so angry that he nearly burst; he turned to me and said: "And what faults can you point out?"

"I shall tell you if you've the patience to listen." . . .

"The expert school of Florence says that if Hercules' hair were shaven off there wouldn't be enough of his pate [head] to hold in his brain; and that one can't be sure whether his face is that of a man or a cross between a lion and an ox; that it's not looking the right way; and that it's badly joined to the neck, so clumsily and unskilfully that nothing worse has ever been seen; . . . that his . . . muscles aren't based on a man's but are copied from a great sack full of melons, set upright against a wall As for the legs, it's impossible to understand how they're attached to the sorry-looking trunk; it's impossible to see on which leg he's standing, or on which he's balancing, and he certainly doesn't seem to be resting his weight on both, as is the case with some of the work

Hercules was a Greco-Roman god most famous for 12 labors he performed to atone for crimes he committed while insane. Cacus was a fire-breathing Roman god. He stole giant cattle from Hercules, who then killed him.

A sacristy is a room in a church where sacred utensils and vestments are kept.

done by those artists who know something As for the arms, it's said that they both stick out awkwardly; that they're so inelegant that it seems you've never set eyes on a live nude; that the right leg of Hercules is joined to that of Cacus in the middle in such a way that if one of the two were removed both of them—not merely one—would be without a calf

Suddenly the fellow cried out: "Oh, you wicked slanderer, what about my design?"

I replied that anyone who was good at designing would never make a bad statue, therefore I judged that his design was the same quality as his work

